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ABSTRACT

Subjects (40 male, 40 female) viewed a videotaped "interview" with a competent female stimulus person (SP) who appeared to be sex-role congruent or incongruent and was either physically attractive or unattractive. Interpersonal attraction (Likability) was assessed by objective questionnaires. Subjects' sex and attitudes toward women were included in data analysis. Physical attractiveness had the only consistently reliable effect on Likability of the SPs with the more attractive being preferred over the unattractive regardless of sex-role interests. Evaluation of SP's competence and employee preference were found to be a function of both attractiveness and sex-role interests: attractive SPs were attributed greater competency and were preferred as employees as were incongruent SPs; an interaction between the two was also present. The lack of a role-congruence effect on Likability led to the conclusion that physical attractiveness masked the presence of sex-role interests with Likability determined primarily by attractiveness. However, the competence and employee preference analyses suggest that traits may be differentially evaluated according to the situation to which consideration is given (e.g., a social vs. a work relationship). When attractiveness and sex-role interests vary, perhaps a distinction should be maintained between liking in social and work-related instances. (Author)

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Effects of Perceived Attractiveness and Sex-Role Interests on Interpersonal Attraction

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Effects of Perceived Attractiveness and Sex-Role Interests on Interpersonal Attraction

The research on interpersonal attraction has revealed certain variables to consistently emerge as apparent determinants of such attraction, among them competence and physical attractiveness. An individual's competency has been shown to promote interpersonal attraction with competent people being preferred over incompetent ones (Aronson, 1969; Deaux, 1972; Metee & Wilkins, 1972; Spence & Helmreich, 1972; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975a). Physical attractiveness is another factor which has considerable influence on the extent one is to be liked. It appears rather ubiquitously that attractive people are generally better liked and received more positive attributions than those of lesser attractiveness (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968; Dermer & Thiel, 1975; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Miller, 1970).

With regard to competence, however, a majority of studies on interpersonal attraction involving competency used males, both as stimulus persons (*SP*s) and subjects (Holmes & Jorgensen, 1971, cited in Spence & Helmreich, 1972). Spence and Helmreich (1972) took this to indicate only that "men like men who are competent." Since males and females are expected to differ in their behavioral traits (Ellis & Bentler, 1973; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975b) it would seem that the effect of competency might differ depending upon the sex of the person exhibiting competence, espicially so since competency is more often attributed to the male than the female (Deaux & Emswiller, 1974; Goldberg, 1968; Mischel, 1974). Not only is it

considered a masculine trait, but women who display competence (particularly in traditionally masculine endeavors) also tend to elicit negative attributions from others (Horner, 1968 & 1972; Spence, 1974). While other stereotyped characteristics (*e.g.*, aggressive, independent, competent) are considered "masculine," their inverse (*e.g.*, submissive, dependent, incompetent) is "feminine" (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970; Chesler & Richmond, 1973; Horner, 1969). An additional factor influencing interpersonal attraction may then be whether the person appears to be congruent or incongruent with regard to sex-role expectancies.

Spence and Helmreich (1972) investigated feminine competency with the expectation that such a trait would be advantageous only in sex-role congruent behavior while disadvantageous in incongruent behavior. Subjects viewed a videotape depicting either a competent or incompetent female *SP* who was either sex-role congruent (feminine interests) or incongruent (masculine interests). Using an objective measure, interpersonal attraction (Likability) was found to be greater for the competent-incongruent *SP* than the competent-congruent *SP* with the incompetent-incongruent being liked least of all. Contrary to what they had thought would occur, Spence and Helmreich suggested that an *SP*'s competency and "masculinity" combined to result in a heightened evaluation instead of the expected decrease.

Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1975a) replicated the study using a different female *SP*. An objective measure of attraction was again used with half the subjects also receiving an additional projective test to determine liking. Results from both tests confirmed earlier findings (*i.e.*, competent-incongruent was preferred over competent-congruent with incompetent-incongruent liked the least). Thus, competency appears to be of some

importance in facilitating the expression of incongruent sex-role interests by a female in addition to affecting interpersonal attraction.

Another variable known to affect interpersonal attraction is that of physical attractiveness which, in turn, may affect the perception of competence and the facility in diverging from traditional sex-role expectancies. Landy and Sigall (1974) had male subjects read and evaluate one of two essays with on being well-written while the other appeared altogether amateurish. Accompanying each was a photograph of "the author," either an attractive or unattractive female. Evaluations (quality, style, content, *etc.*) of both articles were considerably higher when they were attributed to the attractive female than when attributed to the unattractive female.

Typically, both males and females are influenced by the attractiveness of another which often has a pronounced effect on their attributions and expectations of the individual, especially so in initial or brief encounters. However, the effect of physical attractiveness when a female expresses atypical sex-role interests has not been investigated. Since competency was shown to have differential effects on interpersonal attraction toward congurent and incongruent females, attractiveness may also have differential effects with regard to congruency. Specifically, this study was concerned with what effect attractiveness may have on interpersonal attraction (*i.e.*, likability) when a competent female is incongruent as opposed to congruent in her choice of sex-role interests and behavior.

Method

Summary of Design

The principle independent variables were characteristics of a female stimulus person (*SP*): Her attractiveness (either high or low) and the role

she played in a videotaped presentation (sex-role congruent or incongruent). The *SP* was portrayed as competent in all conditions. A factorial design was formed with two levels of attractiveness and two levels sex-role interests with 10 male and 10 female subjects per cell. Subjects evaluated the *SP* on objective questionnaires; subjects' sex and their attitudes toward women were also included in the subsequent data analysis.

Subjects

The subjects were 40 male and 40 female undergraduates enrolled at Baylor University who volunteered to participate. In soliciting subjects, students were informed that the study dealt with the impression formation involving a short videotaped presentation and that the concern of the experimenter was to evaluate the accuracy of impression formed of an individual on the basis of a limited amount of information.

Assessment Measures

An objective Evaluation Questionnaire was used by which subjects rated the *SP* (*cf.* Spence & Helmreich, 1972; Spence, *et.al.*, 1975a) with each question scored on a 6-point scale with one point equivalent to a very low rating. Four items dealt with the Liability of the *SP* (the extent to which she was liked, how much she would be desired as a friend, liked to work with, and liked to have as an employee) which were summed to produce a single index of Likability for each subject. Other items were used to evaluate the *SP*'s intelligence, attractiveness, self-assurrance, femininity, mental adjustment, aggressiveness, independence, dominance, and competence.

The Attitudes toward Women Scale (AWS) (Spence, *et.al.*, 1973) was used to determine whether a subject held traditional or more liberal views toward

women and their roles in society. Response values on this measure ranged from 0 to 3 points with 0 indicative of a traditional response and 3 points of a liberal, pro-feminist one.

Experimental Conditions

Four videotaped segments, approximately five minutes in length, were prepared which presented a female *SP* in an office setting being asked questions concerning her interests, abilities, and achievements by a non-visible male interviewer.[2] The *SP* was either of high or low attractiveness and was either sex-role congruent or incongruent as connoted by her replies to the interviewer's inquiries.

A naturally attractive female served as *SP* for all experimental conditions and for the unattractive conditions was simply made up to appear as such.[3] As the *SP* was very attractive naturally, in the attractive conditions she wore a minimum of make-up and had her natural, attractive hair style (long blond hair). For the unattractive conditions make-up was used to darken her eyes and cheeks giving her face a sunken-in appearance and a conspicuous "beauty mark" was pencilled in on her chin. Cotton gauze was used to make her lips protrude and she wore a blond wig which was not of a becoming or attractive style. She was modestly dressed in all conditions.

Masculinity or femininity of interests involved the use of different "scripts" for the contrasting conditions (cf. Spence & Helmreich, 1972; Spence, *et.al.*, 1975a). The same interview questions were used in each condition and the *SP* always appeared competent. The incongruent *SP* described herself as a Senior physics major having maintained a 3.8 grade point average throughout her college education with plans to get a doctorate in the field. She enjoyed skiing and maintained her own car, was an active member in a

campus ecology club, and had organized a math and science tutorial program for high school students. The congruent *SP* was equally competent, only her interests differed. She was a fine arts major specializing in interior and fabric design. She made her own clothes, enjoyed bridge and gourmet cooking, was involved in a university glee club, and had organized an English tutorial program for high school students.

Procedure

The videotaped segments were shown to groups averaging five subjects per group. Each group was told they were to see a segment of a personal interview session with a student and that the intent of the study was concerned with the accuracy of impressions formed of an individual on the basis of a limited amount of information.

One of the four segments, having been randomly selected, was then presented using a Sony Videocorder (Model AV-3650) with a 20-inch television monitor. It should be noted that random selection was subject to one restriction--once the necessary number of subjects (10 male and 10 female) had been obtained in a particular condition that tape was no longer included for possible selection.

Following the tape presentation, subjects completed the Evaluation Questionnaire; the AWS followed. The intent of the study was then explained further, making note of any suspicions, and any questions answered. Subjects were thanked for participating and asked not to discuss or reveal the content of the study to other students. Data collection was completed within five days perhaps minimizing the extent to which the study's intent could be disseminated among new subjects.

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of, and possible interactions between, physical attractiveness and sex-role congruence or incongruence on interpersonal attraction (Likability). Two questionnaire items served as manipulation checks on the independent variables. The attractive *SP*s were reliably rated as such over their unattractive counterparts, F (1,72) = 304.1, $p < .01$, and the difference in sex-role interests was likewise noted, F (1,72) = 32.3, $p < .01$.

From the Evaluation Questionnaire, subjects'ratings on the four Likability items were summed to produce the Likability index for each subject. Subjects were also categorized according to their attitudes toward women with those having AWS scores above the median of the AWS distribution being deemed liberal in their attitudes and those below conservative. While there were no significant differences in AWS due to exposure to the various treatment conditions, females did express greater egalitarian attitudes than did the males, F (1,72) = 5.9, $p < .05$.

A least-squares analysis of variance-method two (Overall & Spiegel, 1969) was performed on Likability taking into account subjects' sex, *SP*'s attractiveness, *SP*'s role-congruence, and subjects' AWS (conservative or liberal). The results are summarized in Table 1. Attractiveness was most prominent in its effect with the more attractive *SP*s consistently better liked relative to the unattractive ones ($p < .01$). There were no signifi-

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Insert Table 1 and Figure 1 about here

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cant effects attributable to subjects' sex or *SP*'s sex-role interests although the present data revealed the presence of a slight but non-significant

trend for the congruent *SP*s to be preferred (se Figure 1). Although the higher scores on the AWS were associated with greater Likability of the *SP*s ($p < .05$), there were no interactions as had been expected, especially with regard to AWS and *SP*'s role-congruence. It would appear that the major determinant of Likability of the *SP*s was that of her attractiveness with little consideration given to her other characteristics.

An additional analysis was performed on the evaluation of an *SP*'s competence, the results of which are summarized in Table 2. The perceived competence of the *SP* was seen to vary as a function of both her attractiveness

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Insert Table 2 and Figure 2 about here

($p < .01$) and her sex-role interests ($p < .01$) with an interaction occurring between them ($p < .05$). The attractive *SP*s were generally attributed greater competence than unattractive *SP*s (see Figure 2) while the incongruent *SP*s were also believed to be more competent than their feminine counterparts. This difference in perceived competence between congruent and incongruent *SP*s was particularly evident in the unattractive condition. This suggests that competency may be viewed as being consistent with a female's sex-role incongruence (masculine interests) while perhaps not so for congruent individuals.

Discussion

Attractiveness was the only variable having any reliable and consistent effect on likability. In addition, it appeared to have been of sufficient magnitude to mask any effect which might have resulted from other variables involved, particularly that of sex-role interests. As the same basic scripts

were used as in the Spence, *et.al.* studies which reported significant effects attributable to sex roles (*i.e.*, incongruent females preferred over congruent), it seemed reasonable to assume that such an effect might also occur in this study. However, they had used *SP*s of moderate attractiveness so as not to influence subjects' evaluations of the *SP* as a result of attractiveness. With the present study's addition of a physical attractiveness variable to the same basic design, there appeared no difference in liking which could be attributed to the *SP*'s apparent role-congruent (feminine) or incongruent (masculine) interests. Based upon the present findings, it is suggested that perhaps the enhancing effect provided by a combination of masculinity of interests and competency on interpersonal attraction, as proposed by Spence and Helmreich (1972), may only exist when dealing with individuals of average attractiveness. If this proposed masculine-competent effect were to hold true for all situations, then in the present study the observed difference between the two conditions in which the *SP* was both "masculine" and competent should not have occurred as the only objective difference between them was that of attractiveness. It would then appear that likability was based primarily upon the attractiveness of the *SP* with little or no regard afforded her sex-role interests. Thus, when high or low levels of attractiveness become involved (at least for a female), the salience of other characteristics, in particular sex-role congruence or incongruence, may be lessened and its importance as a variable in interpersonal attraction may decrease substantially.

Not only were attractive *SP*s liked more than unattractive *SP*s, but attractiveness also differentially influenced the evaluation of competence (similar to Landy & Sigall, 1974) even though attractive and unattractive

*SP*s presented identical information as to their ability within role-congruence conditions. While the attractive-congruent *SP* was rated almost as competent as the attractive-incongruent *SP*, there was a large discrepancy between the congruent and incongruent unattractive *SP*s. Attractiveness, being associated with femininity, may be seen as a necessary prerequisite for feminine pursuits while competence (with its masculine association) is more important in the pursuit of more masculine endeavors. Thus, the unattractive-congruent *SP* may not have been expected to be as competent in her ability to succeed in her feminine pursuits as a result of not being attractive. And since the unattractive-incongruent *SP* is in pursuit of masculine interests, her attractiveness may be of less importance than her competence.

The difference in competence evaluations, however, were not due solely to the effect of attractiveness for presumed competence also appeared to be a function of perceived sex-role interests. Incongruent *SP*s were attributed greater competence than congruent *SP*s. As competence has been considered a "masculine" trait (Horner, 1969; Spence & Helmreich, 1972) and is sometimes detrimental when exhibited by a female (Horner, 1968 & 1970; Spence, 1974) may perhaps explain why the incongruent *SP*s were viewed as being more competent than congruent *SP*s and competency may have simply been another one of her incongruent characteristics. Just as competency is differentially evaluated for equally competent males and females (Deaux & Emswiller, 1974; Goldberg, 1968; Mischel, 1974), so may it be for incongruent and congruent females as the present data suggest.

Since competence was not as distinctively affected by attractiveness as Likability, and while sex-role interests were of little consequence on Likability while not so with regard to perceived competence, it might be helpful to detail further the assessment of Likability. The Likability index

used here differed somewhat from that of Spence and Helmreich (1972) in that no differentiation was made between Social and Work Likability. Specific items for Social Likability of the *SP* referred to how well she was liked and the extent to which she would be desired as a friend. Work Likability referred to the extent to which she would be liked to work with and to have as an employee. Because of a high correlation previously found between Social and Work Likability, Spence, *et.al.* (1975a) believed it sufficient to refer to only Social Likability.

Although the same questions were used in the present study, instead of separating them or referring to only one pair, all four items were combined to produce a single index of what was thought to be a more encompassing measure of liking. It may be the case that when high and low levels of attractiveness are involved, rather than only moderate attractiveness, there no longer exists such a high correlation between Social and Work Likability. Consideration of whom one would like to work with in some instances may depend more upon capabilities than appearance while social associations may place more emphasis on physical appearance. Therefore, perhaps one should analyze separately Social and Work Likability when attractiveness varies. Because of the manner in which data was recorded, a complete analysis as such was not possible here. However, the present study's analysis of competence may be similar to Work Likability in that competence might be considered an important determinant of whether or not to prefer someone in a work situation. An analysis was possible using only one of the itmes for Work Likability--how much the *SP* would be desired as an employee. The results (graphed in Figure 3) were quite similar to those previously presented for competence with both attractiveness, $F\ (1,76) = 7.9$, $p < .01$, and role-

congruence, F (1,76) = 5.1, $p < .05$, influencing subjects' evaluations with an interaction also occurring, F (1,76) = 4.3, $p < .05$. While liking as an employee was not noticeably affected by sex-role interests for attractive

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Insert Figure 3 about here

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*SP*s, there was a discrepancy between congruent and incongruent unattractive *SP*s. Similarly, attractiveness made little difference in liking among the incongruent *SP*s where employee preference was concerned (possibly related to competency attributions) whereas between congruent *SP*s the unattractive one was considerably less preferred as an employee.

Although attractiveness was found to be the primary determinant of interpersonal attraction as assessed by the present study's index of Likability, it may only be so prominent when considering someone as to their desirability as a social acquaintance (Social Likability). The importance of physical attractiveness appeared to decline somewhat when evaluating competence or whether someone would make a good employee (Work Likability) and subjects perhaps considered additional information, basing their evaluations on evidence more pertinent to the situation. Because of the sex-role differences evident in evaluations of competence and liking as an employee which were absent in Likability, it might be advisable to retain Social and Work Likability as separate indices of interpersonal attraction in some instances.

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Footnotes

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[2]The assistance of Ailene English in serving as *SP* and Bob and Bonnie Morrill who aided in the videotape production is greatly appreciated.

[3]Eight judges (4 males, 4 females) had agreed that the *SP* for this study was indeed attractive or unattractive in the designated experimental conditions.

Table 1

Analysis of Variance Summary for Likability

Source of Variation	*df*	*MS*	*F*
Subjects' Sex (A)	1	3,380	0.511
SP's Attractiveness (B)	1	430.024	65.055**
SP's Role-Congruence (C)	1	20.976	3.173
Subjects' AWS (D)	1	29.933	4.528*
A X B	1	3.413	0.516
A X C	1	1.986	0.300
A X D	1	0.669	0.101
B X C	1	4.231	0.640
B X D	1	1.377	0.208
C X D	1	19.765	2.990
A X B X C	1	1.193	0.180
A X B X D	1	2.061	0.312
A X C X D	1	7.188	1.087
B X C X D	1	0.042	0.006
A X B X C X D	1	7.516	1.137
Error	64	6.610	

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

Table 2

Analysis of Variance Summary for Attributed Competence

Source of Variance	*df*	*MS*	*F*
Subjects' Sex (A)	1	7.813	1.708
SP's Attractiveness (B)	1	59.512	13.012**
SP's Role-Congruence (C)	1	94.613	20.687**
A X B	1	1.013	0.221
A X C	1	1.013	0.221
B X C	1	19.012	4.157*
A X B X C	1	13.613	2.976
Error	72	4.574	

*$p < .05$

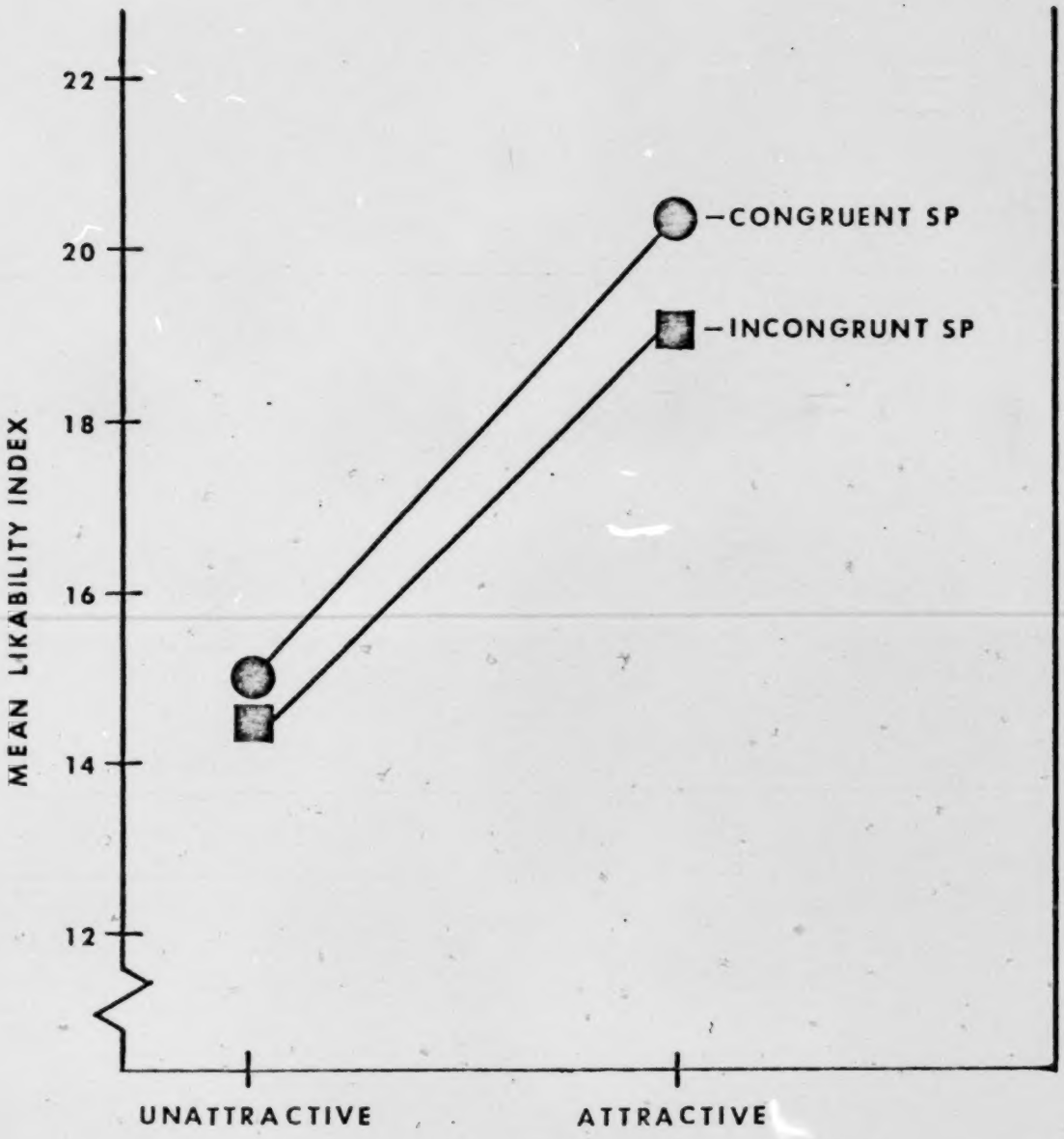
**$p < .01$

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Likability of *SP*s as a function of attractiveness and role-congruence.

Figure 2. Competency attributions as a function of *SP*s' attractiveness and role-congruence.

Figure 3. Liking of *SP*s as an employee.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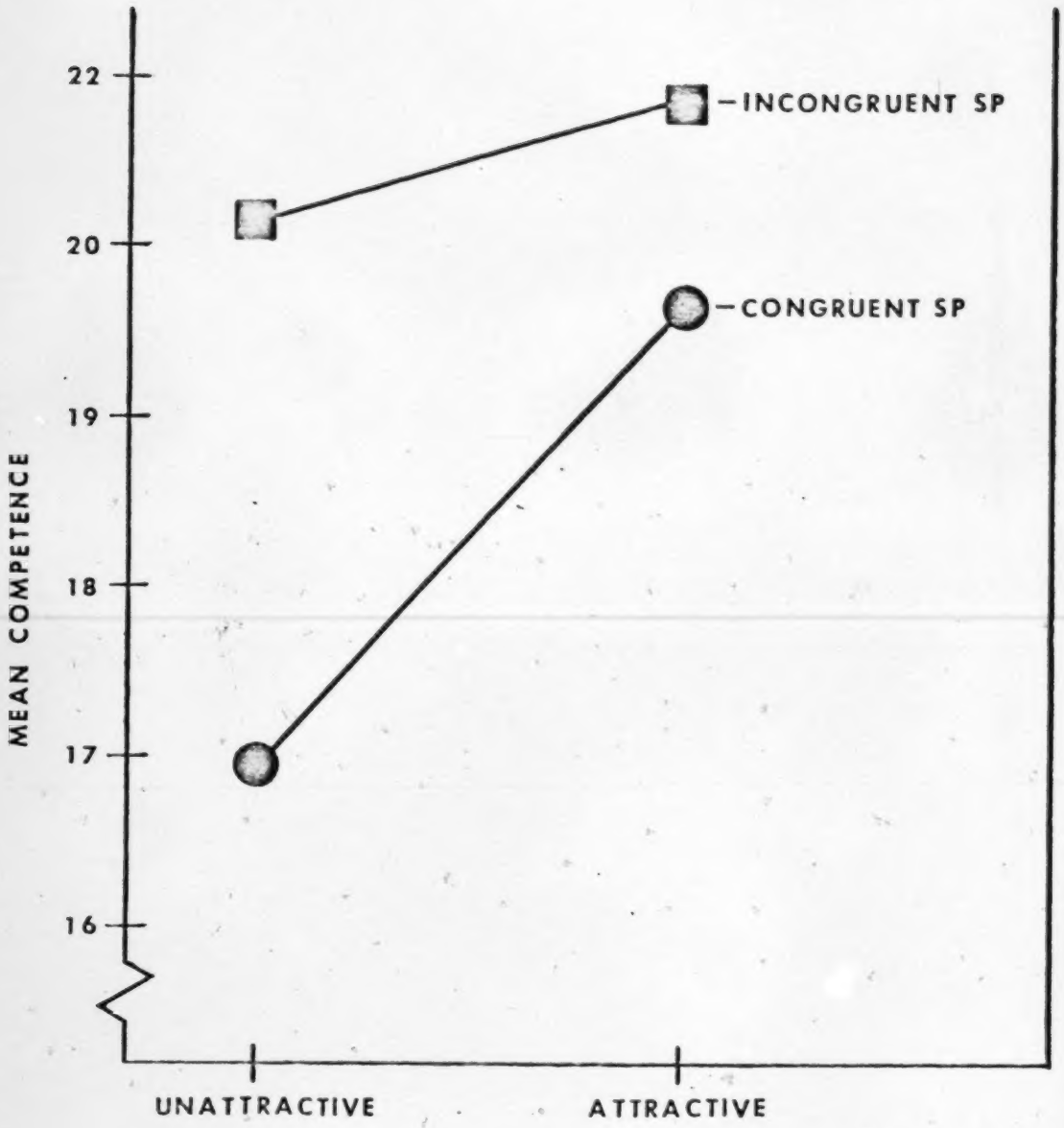
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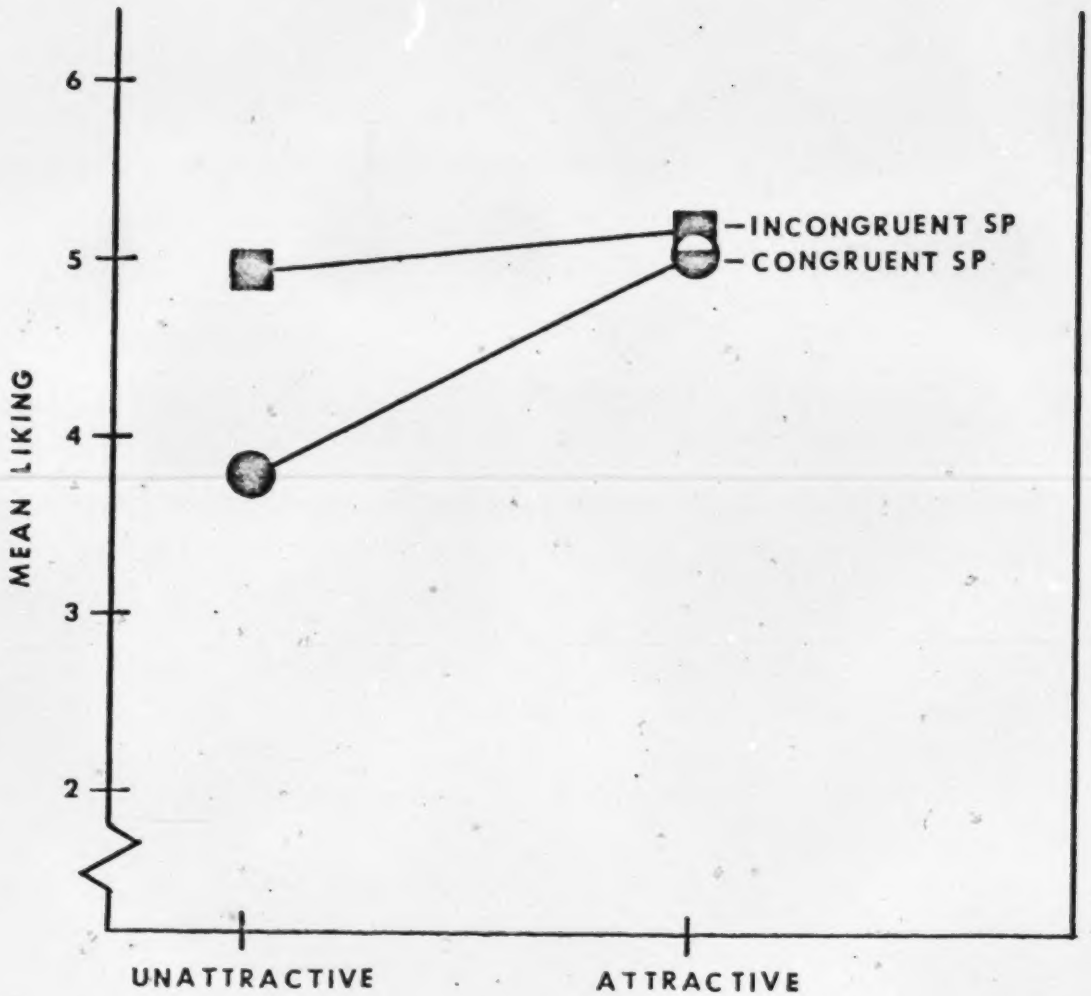
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